

THE AZTEC CHILDREN.

[From Redfield's "Comparative Physiognomy, or Resemblance between Men and Animals," a curious volume, by the way, we take the following remarks on the Aztec children, which show, at least, the author's very close observation of those remarkable specimens of humanity:]

Whoever has seen the "Aztec children," whatever may have been his speculations respecting them, will jump at the idea of their resemblance to mice. The feeling they awaken is a compound of repugnance, playfulness, curiosity, and fondness. But, however much, gentle reader, you may feel a disinclination to touch them, you will be ready to spring upon them as the embodiments of a truth, and clasp them to your hearts. Besides, if you are capable of seeing beauty in a mouse, with his peculiar habits, his confidence, his distrust, his audacity, his silken hair, his delicate structure, his active temperament, his tiny limbs, his round chest, his little big head, his sparkling black eyes, his disproportioned chops, in which mischief is concealed under gravity—if you are capable of sympathizing in his misfortunes, of desiring to protect him, or of a temptation to enlarge him when he has unluckily fallen into a trap—then you are capable of seeing beauty in the Aztec children, and of feeling an affection for them. You will have no disposition to call them fools: *they are noodles.*

Their resemblance to mice is in everything they do, and in every part from top to toe, but most in the countenance, and in those things which it is impossible for the artist to portray. The only correct impression that can be made upon them is upon the retina: a second-hand solar impression, like the daguerreotype, will never do. In the proportions of the jaws, in the peculiar form and expression of the mouth, in that nose, so full of fire, energy, and comicality, and in a certain something diffused over all so like what we discover in the mouse, we cannot fail to see a wonderful relation between the two. From such lips as those you argue a pair of incisors similar to those of a mouse: and the truth is, the boy, who has his second set, has but one pair of cutting-teeth in each jaw. To the exercise of gnawing we should imagine that nothing could be better suited than the cracker which constitutes their principal food. They are wonderfully mischievous, but not wilfully or maliciously so. The boy is fond of teasing his sister, of intermeddling, of having "a finger in the pie," but it is all for the sake of fun and frolic, the gratification of curiosity, the largest liberty, and the indulgence of the senses.

You must not look in their countenances for the expression of delight, so much as in their feet: their nether extremities are curiosities equal to those of the mouse, and the appearance and feeling of their hands confirm the resemblance. There is no warmth in them—they are like dead things: and though there is a certain glow in the countenance of the girl, it is too literally ruby to answer the expectation arising from the association of "ruby lips." If you would understand the strange sensation that is produced by contact, you can experience it by kissing the lips of a

marble statue. Of this we are assured on good authority, for it is no unusual thing for matronly ladies to manifest the common fondness for children towards the girl Bartola. But the countenance of Maximo is absolutely dead, except a faint attempt at roguishness which may occasionally be discovered in the corners of his mouth. The greater amount of love which falls naturally to the female, gives a life-like appearance to the face of his sister, and thus an interest, which his has not.

There is no accounting for tastes except on principles of Physiognomy. People who resemble owls are attracted to the Aztecs, and find in them a gratification of their tastes and an ample field for the exercise of affection and fondness. The same is true of those who resemble cats. In the cat the qualities of the mouse are assimilated, and she can but love that which gratifies her, and which corresponds to the playfulness, the refinement, the cunning, and so many other things, in her own nature. The part of her nature that is not mouse is made up of a bird and fish, both of which she is exceedingly fond. That a cat is fond of mice in a higher sense than is usually understood, is manifest from the delighted expression of her eyes when she sees one, and from her playing with it before she appropriates its little flesh and bones to the gratification of appetite. You can see that the mouse "fills her eye," as something both good for food and fair to look upon. Thus it is that the eye expresses taste and appetite in relation to beauty and quality, which are in most cases inseparable. The little mouse appeals to the cat through her love of infants, which is wonderful; and it is affection, not hatred, in connection with her appetite, that makes her devour it. Females who resemble cats threaten to devour their little ones, play with them as a cat with a mouse, bite harder than they intend, and really feel as if it would be a pleasure to swallow them alive if there was not a higher law of nature, the "sovereignty of the individual" to oppose it. We saw one man in whom the Aztec children excited extraordinary affection and delight. He kissed the girl, was enthusiastic in his admiration of their beauty, and went into an ecstasy at the grace and liveness of their manners. He had a very parental expression of countenance, and resembled a cat almost as much as the children resembled mice.

These children never walk: they always run. Explaining the constant flexure of their legs by the idea that they may have had the rheumatism some time or other, is ridiculous. Except when they jump, they run with a gliding motion, which requires a peculiar step, like that of the mouse. There is no elevation upon the toes, or from straightening of the limb, so that (as in the absence of locomotion, or of steps and paces) the attention is directed principally to the head, that glides mysteriously along, like a mouse, or like a ball that is kicked from one end of a room to the other; the force seems to be not in itself, but behind it, or out and around. The whole expression of the countenance is external, as if in the gratification of the senses it would spend its existence. In this, too, the Aztec children resemble mice. The first time we saw the boy Maximo,

there was so little expression of internal consciousness, that we questioned whether he was alive. In our imagination he was the first man, made of red clay, with the life breathed into his nostrils, where it seemed to reside, but that he had not yet become a living soul. As for Bartola, she should be called "Undine," but how she crept into the soul of the author of that delightful story, it is impossible to conceive. We should not be more surprised to see her in a little chariot drawn by mice, than we were at the first sight of her. Poets may cease dreaming of fairies, for their dreams are realized. If spirits should claim that these were the first fruits of their endeavor to clothe themselves with material forms, we should be inclined to believe them.

But, seriously, these children do not seem like beings of flesh and blood. They may be taken for souls without bodies, or bodies without souls, whichever we please:—

"All eye, all ear, the disembodied soul!"—

and that is what these Aztec children are, though it is pretty evident that their spirits are on the outside, and that their senses are external. Their spirits may be said to have "stepped out," and this gives the impression that they are dead. This, and the instant association of their features with the Aztec images, and with the sculptured heads on the Central-American ruins, to which they bear so striking a resemblance, impressed our minds with the idea that they were the work of some modern Prometheus who had discovered the art of creating human beings artificially. That grave countenance, like that of a graven image; those lively extremities, which might owe their activity to galvanism rather than to a head so motionless as theirs; those animated dead eyes; that stifled voice, extorted as it were by screws and pinching; that unearthly attempt to speak; those threads and hinges on which the motive power, whatever it is, is intended to operate—these, and other things too numerous to mention, constitute a resemblance to the mouse. On the whole, they are pretty little contrivances for the diversion of ladies and gentlemen, old and young.